Telstra
Talking Loneliness Report
Research into the state of loneliness in Australia in 2021

telstra.com/loneliness
Foreword

“With so many feeling reluctant to speak up, we need to start talking more about loneliness.”

Telstra has been connecting people for more than 100 years and in today’s world everyone and everything is connected. Despite this there are so many people in the community who feel disconnected. As a company with connectivity at the heart of our purpose, we are shining a light on this important issue and encouraging people to start a conversation about loneliness.

With so many feeling reluctant to speak up, being open about loneliness will help those who cannot raise the issue. It could be affecting your brother, neighbour or workmate and you may never know. That’s why we want to challenge the preconceptions about who might be lonely and to encourage Australians to find a sense of connection through sharing experiences.

While it was a significant societal issue beforehand, more than a quarter of Australians experienced loneliness for the first time during COVID. We know the pandemic has had a huge impact on mental health but now we also know how it has accelerated the widespread issue of loneliness.

In this report, conducted in association with YouGov, we have captured a snapshot of loneliness in Australia right now. We have also looked at who suffers it, how it presents, as well as some of the ways we can start to address it, for ourselves and others.

The report is one way we can bring focus to this growing issue. We hope its findings alongside the other resources we are bringing together help spark a conversation about loneliness, with your family, friends, or maybe someone you have not spoken to before or in a long time – reaching out might just make someone’s day.

Andrew Penn
CEO
Telstra
Loneliness in Australia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four in ten (44%) Australians regularly feel lonely</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nine in ten (91%) Australians have experienced feelings of loneliness</td>
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**How often do Australians feel lonely?**

- Often/always: 17%
- Some of the time: 27%
- Occasionally: 25%
- Hardly ever: 21%
- Never: 9%

**How loneliness can feel**

- More than half of Australians feel they lack companionship: 54%
- One in four say they never or rarely feel ‘in tune’ with the people around them: 25%
- One in four Australians say they don’t have people they can regularly talk or turn to: 24%
- Almost six in ten Australians say they regularly feel left out: 58%
- Three in ten Australians say they rarely feel they have a lot in common with the people around them: 30%
- Three in ten Australians say they never or rarely feel close to people: 29%
- Almost two in three Australians say they regularly feel isolated from others: 63%
- More than a third of Australians say they never or rarely feel like they are part of a group of friends: 35%
The stigma of loneliness

- Two in five Australians agree that they worry others will judge them if they say they are lonely (41%)
- Two in five Australians say they are worried others will think there is something wrong with them if they say they are lonely (41%)
- One third of Australians say that when they feel lonely they feel ashamed about it (32%)
- 1 in 2 Australians say that when they feel lonely they are too embarrassed to admit that to others (48%)
- Six in ten Australians say that when they feel lonely they do not talk to others about it (61%)
- Six in ten Australians say they can recognise if friends or loved ones are lonely, with women more likely to agree with this sentiment compared to men (65% compared to 58%)

Australians in rural regions who feel lonely are almost twice as likely as Australians in inner metro areas to say they do not do anything to combat feelings of loneliness

Misconceptions of loneliness

Looking at the age groups most likely to be perceived as lonely, the research found that six in ten (60%) Australians assumed people aged 65+ are the loneliest group in their community.

However, when asked directly, those aged 65+ are the most likely generation to say they ‘never’ or ‘hardly ever’ feel lonely (46%).
What would make it easier to get involved in new activities?

- Having a friend join: 51%
- Feeling like a person like you would be welcome there: 46%
- Having information about activities: 41%
- Knowing the people running the activity: 39%
- Support from family: 27%
- Assistance with transport: 20%

Barriers for new meaningful connections

- Low social confidence: 41% vs 36% (women vs men)
- Lack of social opportunities: 43%
- Lack of money or financial resources: 38%
- Lack of time: 37%
- Poor health: 34%
- Transport to access activities: 28%

How Australians like to connect with others

- Texting: 55%
- Phone calls: 47%
- Social media applications: 47%
- Emails: 40%
- Videos calls: 27%
- Gaming: 9%

One third of Australians prefer online social interaction than face-to-face interaction

More than half of Australians say texting/messaging is more comfortable to them than making a phone call

One third of Australians say they feel more comfortable interacting with unfamiliar people online than in person
More than one in four Australians say that COVID-19 has caused them to experience loneliness for the first time.

Almost half of Australians say they have felt lonelier as a result of the lockdown.

Almost two in five Australians say they have never felt more lonely than they have felt in lockdown.
Managing loneliness

To help when they feel lonely, Australians:

- Engage in a hobby: 49%
- Exercise: 40%
- Play with their pet: 31%
- Meditate: 13%
- Call or text someone: 43%
- Reach out to a loved one: 34%
- Start a conversation with someone: 23%
- Reach out to someone on social media: 21%
- Reach out to an old friend: 20%

Women who feel lonely are more likely than men to call or text someone

- Women: 50%
- Men: 36%

and reach out to a loved one to manage feelings of loneliness

- Women: 38%
- Men: 29%

Men who feel lonely are more likely than women to say they do not do anything to manage feelings of loneliness

- Men: 9%
- Women: 7%

You can help others manage feelings of loneliness by:

- Getting in touch for any reason: 62%
- Checking in on how they are doing: 55%
- Inviting them to something: 44%
**Millenials and Gen Z**

Millenials and Gen Z are the loneliest age groups in society but also the most likely to be too embarrassed to admit it

54% of Gen Z and 51% of Millennials say they feel lonely either often, always or some of the time, which is higher than all other generations.

51% of Australians aged 18–24 label themselves as the most lonely group in their community.

Lonely Gen Z Australians are the generation most embarrassed to admit their feelings to others.

52% of Gen Z and 50% of Millennials say they are worried others will judge them if they say they are lonely – more than all other generations.

Younger Australians are more likely than their older counterparts to say that when they feel lonely they do not talk to others about it – Gen Z 68%, Millennials 62% and Gen X 65%, compared to Baby Boomers 56% and Silent 52%.

Gen Z is the most likely generation to prefer to use social media (71%) and gaming (30%) as technology platforms to connect with others.

**Spotlight on**

**LGBTQI+ Community**

LGBTQI+ Australians are more than twice as likely to say they often or always feel lonely.

LGBTQI+ Australians are more likely to be worried others will judge them if they say they are lonely.

63% of Australians who identify as LGBTQI+ say it would be easier to attend or get involved in events if it felt like a person like themselves would be welcome there.

**Spotlight on**

**Parenting**

Throughout the pandemic we’ve never spent more time at home and with family, though COVID-19 has caused many Australian parents* to experience loneliness for the first time.

48% of Australian parents’ say they feel lonely either often, always or some of the time.

COVID-19 has caused 2 in 5 Australian parents’ to experience loneliness for the first time.

1 in 2 Australian parents’ are worried others will judge them if they say they are lonely.

55% of lonely Australian parents’ are too embarrassed to admit it to others.

*Parents with children under 18 at home.

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About the research

This study was conducted online between 6-12 September 2021. The sample comprised of a nationally representative sample of 3,047 Australians aged 18 years and older. Following the completion of interviewing, the data was weighted by age, gender and region to reflect the latest ABS population estimates. The questionnaire was created by YouGov in consultation with Telstra and Dr Michelle H Lim, Scientific Chair & Chairperson, Ending Loneliness Together, Co-Director, Global Initiative on Loneliness and Connection, Research Fellow & Clinical Psychologist, Iverson Health Innovation Research Institute, Swinburne University of Technology.

Research methodology references

University of California Loneliness Scale 9 items (UCLA-LS-9)

ONS Loneliness Item
Office for National Statistics. Measuring loneliness: guidance for use of the national indicators on surveys. United Kingdom 2018

Acknowledgement
BBC Loneliness Survey & University of Manchester, Prof Pamela Quilter on the use of loneliness stigma questions

Support services

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<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>Beyond Blue</td>
<td>1300 22 4636</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifeline</td>
<td>13 11 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids Helpline</td>
<td>1800 55 1800</td>
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